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## EDUCATION AND EARNING POWER

By RUTH BREWSTER SHERMAN, R.N.

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Would abolishing our present fixed rate of charges for work make our profession more attractive to college graduates? Would such a change in nursing policy help to raise the degree of education which could be required of probationers? If in our profession, as in others, increased experience and efficiency brought also increased earning power, might not more college women choose nursing as a life work? Let us look into this a little.

The constant effort of the state laws and hospital superintendents is to raise the educational requirements for probationers. Yearly the hospital training becomes more elaborate, yearly more lines of work are open to graduate nurses, constantly more is demanded of them. Greater technical training calls for minds enlarged and developed by greater previous education. Without doubt a college graduate could take a nurse's training much more easily and with vastly more pleasure and mental profit, than does a young woman of only high school education. No doubt she would be more valuable and profitable to her hospital, also. Perhaps the time will come when the best training schools, like the best medical schools, will require a college degree as a preliminary and will also charge for tuition. As between pupil and hospital, this will perhaps be right; but the training school is only the middle ground between the student and her future career, and no professional school of any kind is supposed to exact more from its students than the students may reasonably expect to get back from their careers, later on. A woman who passed through secondary school, college and training school and paid for tuition in all, would be making entirely too large an outlay of time, effort and money on her education unless she had much larger opportunity to repay herself later, than nursing now gives, no matter what branch of nursing is followed.

The average intelligent and ambitious girl chooses her vocation while she is in the high school or secondary school and usually her studies are chosen accordingly. If she has decided to be a nurse, she will have at least four years to wait after high school before she can enter the best training schools. Can we expect her to spend these intervening years

in college? She will be much more apt to do some money-earning work, in anticipation of the non-earning years in training school. College means a large outlay of money. The average woman goes to college because she must support herself and perhaps others too; she certainly expects whatever career she enters to repay her well for the money, time and effort spent on her education. Under present conditions, what branch of nursing will do this?

It is not "commercial," it is not "mercenary," it is not in any way unworthy or contemptible for nurses to look on their life-work as business and professional people look on theirs—as a work to be conducted on business principles, which should eventually yield a good return for the time and money invested in preparation. We are trained in high Christian ideals of service and hold those ideals as our most precious possessions, but are Christian ideals incompatible with sound business principles? Does not the greatest authority on business efficiency of our time rank "high ideals" as the first, and the "fair deal" as another, and "efficiency reward" as the culminating principle of efficiency? Giving without stint or measure, both in hospital and later, our very best and highest endeavor to our fellowmen; looking always closely to the quality of work we do and holding back nothing from those who need us; we still have the right to exercise a due businesslike accuracy. A man would deserve to fail in business who put money into an investment from which he could not expect adequate financial returns, and that is what a woman would be doing who went to college to prepare for studying nursing. In any other line of work she would increase in value as she proved her worth. To a mind capable of ambition, this is a much stronger appeal than the mere fact that upon graduation a nurse steps immediately into a good income. In this age, money value is the measure of all value. Everything is honored or valued or appreciated exactly according to its money worth in open market. Whether we approve of this or not, it is a truth, a fact, against which it is useless to array ourselves. It is just as true of a nurse's work as of the work of a doctor, lawyer, architect, shipbuilder, modiste, merchant or any other business competitor—but we shut our eyes to it!

We are fond of comparing our professional training with that of doctors, the comparative periods students and nurses spend in the wards and in classroom. How does a man get his return from his medical education? After graduating he serves in various hospitals for small compensation and probably goes abroad for further study. This is all still a preparation, a part of his original investment. When he begins practice he often makes only office rent for some years, but he cheerfully looks forward to the time when recognition and success come, when

patients are many, his charges higher and he rises into prominence and honor. This is his return on his investment, the dividends on his principal, and he gets these dividends as his individual worth increases in private practice. Has a nurse a similar experience? If after graduating she does hospital or other institution work for several years, her salary may increase a little as she goes from place to place or gives more years of service. The army and navy nursing, the various government appointments, give increased pay for longer terms of service, but at best she is getting small dividends on her original investment. If after a few years of this she begins private nursing, she begins at once at the maximum price and probably reaches her highest earning capacity the very first year, when she is freshest and strongest. This is gratifying to the "commercial" or "mercenary" instinct, to which money is an aim and an end in itself—it cannot long satisfy the rightful ambition of a woman who is willing to study, work, read, observe, *think*, experiment and compare, in order to improve her methods and increase in professional value; and who properly and rightfully wishes to have a visible way of proving to herself and to others that her work is better at the end of ten years than at the beginning. Has she any way of doing this; any way which is recognized in the business world? Not while prices continue firmly fixed by custom; not until increased experience and skill bring increased compensation.

Nor would these increased prices do away with charity among nurses. We all recognize the Christian obligation to charity, we all work for charities in our various ways and give to them as we can, but at present we are chiefly able to give only one form of help—our time and work, to the sick. If nurses earned more money, they would be able to give more to many other forms of charity, which are now beyond their reach. A nurse with a college education would be interested in church and school work, mission undertakings, social settlements, fresh-air funds, vacation outings for working girls, in prison, child labor and college extension work, and many others. She would want to earn enough to give money to enterprises which she could not help by her individual time and work. Many nurses not college bred also feel this wish.

But the college-trained woman in other professions can, by increased experience, command increased pay; and though she begins with much less than a nurse, in the long run she usually earns more and she reaches a greater earning capacity at a much younger age than a nurse can, and keeps it to a greater age. Therefore, how can we expect our work to capture for its own, college bred women who must support themselves, help others and provide for the future?

As a concrete illustration let me give a story from life, the true story

of three sisters who chose their professions while in high school and prepared themselves accordingly. These three young women being of the same family, educated in the same school and of approximately the same age, it may be assumed that their mental capacities were practically equal.

The first sister decided to be a librarian and after finishing high school entered college where, as part of her collegiate course, she received two years' training as a librarian. Her first position, secured immediately, paid her \$300 the first year, \$450 the second and third; her second position paid \$900 the first year, with a yearly increase in recognition of her added experience and value. Eight years after beginning work she earned \$1200 yearly, with an eight hour day, six days in the week, and one month's vacation. Nor is her limit of salary yet reached.

The second sister decided to teach and completed a college course with a bachelor's degree. Her first school (in the country) paid \$320 for an eight months' term. Her second (a city school) paid \$1000 the first year, with yearly increase for added experience and value. Eight years after beginning work she received \$1600 yearly, with a three-month vacation; and her salary is still growing.

The third sister chose to study nursing. As a college course was out of the question, in addition to the years to be spent later in training school, she took some work which supported her and enabled her to save some money. After three years of training she was necessarily some years older than her sisters had been when they began their professional work. Her earning capacity began at once at \$1000 a year. Twice she rose considerably above that level, but at the end of eight years her earnings were much less than her two sisters'. They had their added salaries as proof of added value in the working world. At the end of eight years, or of eighteen, will not her work too, be better than it was at the beginning? Yes, but she will have no sign and proof of it in the eyes of the world, as they have.

If the third sister had gone to college, would she in any way have improved her financial future? Not under present conditions of our work. She would have been a better hospital student, no doubt a more acceptable private nurse, always a broader woman, all things most desirable and precious in themselves—but she would have largely increased her investment with no prospect of better dividends—which is bad business and not to be thought of in the families of moderate means from which nurses usually come.

In olden times the nursing sisterhoods attracted many women who had no other adequate outlet for their energies and emotions. They were supported by their families or their church.

In modern times can we expect our profession, as at present conducted, to attract women whose minds are sharpened and strengthened by broad education and competitive examinations and who have a fair appreciation of business methods, relative values and legitimate ambition? Evidently the answer lies in the fact that very few such women are thus attracted. If a college woman is interested in disease and health she studies medicine, not nursing. She increases her investment by a much larger outlay of time, work and money; but she knows that financial reward and professional recognition await her at the top of the ladder, if she is but able to climb it.

There are many arguments both for and against the maintaining of our present fixed standard rates of payment, but this paper aims to deal only with the one question, whether its removal would or would not make our profession more attractive to women of higher education—whether abolishing our present system would or would not cause more college graduates to choose nursing as a life work.

## EDUCATION THE KEY-NOTE FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE SCHOOLS FOR NURSES<sup>1</sup>

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When I entered my chosen school for nurses, fifteen years ago, I was taken at once to a ward of twenty beds and told, with a grand flourish of the hand, that those ten patients, all men, were to be mine. Very near me was a great big black one. My feeling was one of a scared and hunted animal, I wanted to run, but pride kept me there rooted to the spot. I was awakened by the head nurse commanding me to fold the spreads and prepare the patients for the night, without any instructions whatsoever, except to hand me a bottle of bathing solution. What I, a timid and scared creature, weighing ninety-eight pounds, suffered, no one can tell except those who have had a similar experience, and the awful feeling that what you are doing may be wrong is to a conscientious woman a tragedy.

At that time instruction was given in a hurried, unsystematic way, in other words, the young woman who got the most out of her training was the one who had the most courage and the most persistence. Many a time she did not understand the instructions given and would

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Alumnae Association of the Ohio Valley General Hospital, formerly the City Hospital.